
**State Government Operations &
Accountability Committee**

HB 3107

Brief Description: Studying military uranium exposure.

Sponsors: Representatives Williams, Quall, Appleton, Morrell, Hasegawa, Campbell, Simpson, Upthegrove, Sells, Lantz, Hudgins, Chase, Ormsby and Roberts.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes duties for the adjutant general regarding veterans and military personnel exposure to depleted uranium.
- Establishes a task force to study the health effects of hazardous materials exposure.

Hearing Date: 1/31/06

Staff: Kasa Tupua (786-7291).

Background:

Depleted uranium (DU) is natural uranium left over after most of the radioactive uranium isotopes are removed for use as nuclear weapons or nuclear fuel. Depleted Uranium becomes a radiation hazard if internalized, such as through inhalation or through wounds.

Testing of the DU for possible military use by the United States military began in the 1960s. Depleted Uranium was first used during the Gulf War as projectiles and armor for tanks.

There are three categories of risk based on the level of the DU exposure:

- Level I, the highest exposure level, is contamination through wounds from the DU ammunition;
- Level II is from inhalation or ingestion; and
- Level III is from brief contact with the DU.

Exposures resulting from levels I and II require 24 hour urine uranium bioassay tests. Level III exposures do not require testing unless the patient or provider requests a test.

In 1993, the Department of Veterans Affairs established a follow up program on the DU exposure. This program is an ongoing study of individuals exposed to the DU during the Gulf War.

Summary of Bill:

Adjutant General Duties

The Adjutant General is directed to assist any eligible member or veteran in obtaining federal treatment services for the DU exposure. Eligible members or veterans are those who have been assigned a risk level of I, II, or III for the DU exposure; have been referred by a military physician; or have reason to believe that they have been exposed to the DU during service.

Federal treatment services include best practice health screening tests, such as urine uranium bioassay procedures. State funds may not be used to pay for these tests or any other federal treatment services.

The Adjutant General must submit a report to the Joint Veterans and Military Affairs Committee regarding members of the Washington national guard's possible exposure to the DU. The report must include a cost and feasibility assessment of adding pre-deployment training on exposure to the DU and other hazardous materials in a combat zone.

Creation of Task Force

A task force is established to study the health effects of hazardous materials exposure to the DU during military service. The task force is directed to:

- initiate a health registry for veterans and military personnel who may have been exposed to the DU or other hazardous materials;
- develop a plan of outreach to and follow-up of military personnel;
- prepare a report for service members regarding potential DU and other toxic exposures and precaution recommendations while in a combat zone; and
- provide other appropriate recommendations.

The task force consists of:

- the Adjutant General;
- the Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs;
- the Secretary of the Department of Health;
- six members of the Legislature;
- two veterans with knowledge of or experience with exposure to hazardous materials; and
- four physicians or scientists with knowledge of or experience in the detection or health effects of exposure to the DU or other hazardous materials.

Staff support to the task force is provided by the Joint Veterans and Military Affairs Committee.

Task force expenses must be paid jointly by the Senate and the House of Representatives, subject to approval by the Senate Facilities and Operations Committee and the House of Representatives Executive Rules Committee.

The bill expires January 31, 2007.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.